

Stakes in Iraq too high to back down

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Nothing threatens the liberal agenda more than failure in the war in Iraq. Those who care about civil liberties, peace and humanitarian causes undermine their own goals unless they exercise restraint, foresight, character and resolve on this one issue. Hard though it may be to accept, even peace activists should support this war.

I thought about this while attending a funeral service for Chris Dickerson at Sweet Home Baptist Church in Chauncy, Ga. Chris was a Navy reservist killed in Fallujah on April 30. I had never met him. But I have known many like him — young men killed during my Army Ranger days in Vietnam.

Whatever your view of the wisdom or justification for invading Iraq, it's done. Perhaps we've stirred up a hornets' nest. So be it. The hornets were coming for us sooner or later anyway.

Leave Iraq in chaos and the world is certainly a more dangerous place than it was.

In the Middle East, terrorism would be ascendant. The progress of moderate forces in Iran would be harshly reversed. Violence and disruption in Afghanistan would soar beyond America's control. We would eventually withdraw there as well, albeit with some superficially face-saving rationale.

Militant Islamists finally would succeed in assassinating Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf and regaining control. Most Jews leaving or avoiding Israel would be moderates, tilting political control further toward the hard-liners. In short, threats to Middle Eastern stability and world peace would increase geometrically.

For America, the inevitable result would be attacks within the United States. Don't like the Patriot Act? You ain't seen nothin' yet. It would pale in comparison to the civil liberties restraints that super-majorities of Americans would embrace, insist upon.

### **Alternatives unthinkable**

Think we overreacted or picked the wrong target with Iraq? Just imagine what would happen if one of our cities is flattened. Americans would scream for immediate retaliation. Conventional military force, perhaps nuclear force, would seek an elusive enemy by hitting real targets, targets occupied by the innocent more so than the guilty.

Although Vietnam was much more intense and bloody, the stakes in Iraq are incomparably higher.

Worried about health care, social justice, the environment, inner-city revitalization, saving Social Security — you name it? Forget it. Few resources and scarce attention would be devoted to anything but security issues.

Like it or not, success in Iraq is now the first agenda item for Americans across the political spectrum. And showing America's resolve is the first order of business.

No alien force, even one as powerful as ours, can alone suppress a violent insurgency in a foreign country, particularly when constrained by rules of conduct like ours. American soldiers alone cannot secure a stable, anti-terrorist Iraq. They can destroy conventional threats facing both them and Iraqis. But Iraqis must police Iraq. The sooner Iraqis do this, the fewer funerals I will attend.

Don't just take my word. Google "Iraq CPA Zarqawi" and read a letter to the al-Qaida leadership written by Abu Musab Zarqawi, the lead foreign terrorist in Iraq and the man who beheaded Nicholas Berg. Zarqawi writes that American soldiers are easy targets who pose no real threat to his efforts. But he says a determined Iraqi security force would surely drive him and his cohorts from Iraq. According to Zarqawi: "With the deployment of [Iraqi] soldiers and [Iraqi]

police, the future has become frightening."

Iraqis must help to secure Iraq. But Iraqis who actively support America face death, especially if America retreats. And they certainly recall what happened to the Shiites after we left in 1991. To win Iraqi cooperation and assistance, America must project confidence and resolve. And here is where I question our national character, where I get a bit angry.

### **Blame spread around**

In recent months, far too much of our national discourse on Iraq has suggested that America was faltering in its resolve, that our constitutional democracy would not stay the course in Iraq. Witness our response to the mistreatment of prisoners at Abu Ghraib. The wrongs themselves clearly harmed our effort to enlist Iraqi support. But our national reaction, the hours-upon-hours of media focus, the calls for Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld's resignation, the weighty statements and articles about the harm to our strategic goals, simply magnified the damage.

And guilt on this score was not confined to the media and Congress. The Army Times reported that some Pentagon insiders dubbed the accused Abu Ghraib guards "the morons who lost the war." If this report is accurate, what Pentagon morons let the words "lost the war" escape its walls?

The right to speak, inquire and protest is protected and cherished in our constitutional democracy. How we exercise that right with regard to Iraq is not only the measure of our national character; it also will directly determine our national future. In our words and in our acts, the vast majority of us — citizens, pundits, politicians and particularly both presidential candidates — must communicate resolve on Iraq.

Suck it up, America. Let's keep Zarqawi frightened. We owe no less to Chris Dickerson, his family and others who have sacrificed so much in this effort.

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